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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000887

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SUBJECT: ICG-M IN ADDIS ABABA: BACKGROUND AND TALKING POINTS

REF: A. ANTANANARIVO 868

1B. ANTANANARIVO 870

1C. ANTANANARIVO 874

1D. PARIS 1754

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF DOVIE HOLLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

11. (C) SUMMARY: On January 6, members of the International Contact Group on Madagascar (ICG-M) will meet in Addis Ababa to discuss the international community's response to recent developments in Antananarivo. This cable contains suggested talking points for use by the U.S. delegation to the ICG-M; see paragraph 4. With Andry "TGV" Rajoelina having unilaterally abandoned a negotiated four-party transition government in favor of a quick push for legislative elections in March 2010, the political divide is as wide as ever between the de facto government and the three principle opposition factions. The international community, however, is in disagreement over the remedy: France has come forward with conditional support for March elections, while most other western missions doubt the feasibility, and credibility, of a rush to the polls. Post recommends that we seek to promote the resumption of talks between the four main political factions, and dissuade the de facto government from pursuing unilaterally-organized elections, despite the French position. At the same time, we should push other ICG members to finally cut assistance to the de facto government (particularly French military cooperation), and give serious consideration to targeted sanctions against the regime leaders. The current unilateral election plan will only serve to lengthen the political, social, and economic crisis, and postpone a real solution. With our "carrots" now exhausted (AGOA, MCC, and assistance to/through the government have all now been terminated or suspended), it is time to push ICG members towards "sticks" they have been avoiding for almost a year now. END SUMMARY.

ELECTIONS ARE THE ANSWER - JUST NOT NOW

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12. (C) On December 16, Rajoelina unilaterally abandoned the consensus-based "Maputo Process" in favor of a rush to elections in March 2010; the opposition, key civil society actors, and most of the international community has condemned the move either publicly or privately as unlikely to resolve the crisis (reflets A and B). France's initial statement on the election plan (citing the need for transparency, an independent electoral commission, and international monitoring) has been interpreted locally as tacit support. French FM Bernard Kouchner himself publicly stated his support for "free and monitored" elections in a separate statement from Paris. Recent reporting from Embassy Paris

(reftel D) also indicates that sources in the Elysee believe that the focus of the January ICG should be "on establishing conditions for elections that will establish a parliament that can revise the constitution, leading to new presidential elections". Despite the obvious difficulty of holding elections in this political climate, the French position at the ICG will evidently be in favor of the Rajoelina plan. The French delegation to the ICG will be led by Cooperation Minister Alain Joyandet.

¶3. (C) Post agrees that the ultimate goal remains free and fair elections, but we disagree on how this will best be achieved; it is impossible to hold credible elections in this environment, and the international community should instead focus on a return to multi-party dialogue. Relations between political factions are at their worst since August, and opposition politicians are not likely to participate in the planned Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), nor in the election that will follow. Opposition leaders are currently observing a "holiday truce", but intend eventually to proceed with their plan to form a three-party parallel government based on the Maputo Charter of the Transition. They have rejected Rajoelina's authority to sack opposition representatives in the short-lived unity government, and do not recognize his new Prime Minister, Colonel Camille Albert Vital. Despite the "truce", the sole remaining high-profile political detainee (Ralitera Andrianandraina) remains in pre-trial detention (for eight months now), and on December 21 the government suspended a news program on pro-Ravalomanana radio station "Fahazavana". On several occasions in December, claims of military unity have been

ANTANANARI 00000887 002 OF 002

sorely tested, first by an unauthorized press conference by nine pro-opposition Colonels (December 15), and most recently with an abortive attempt by a handful of soldiers to "take over" a base in Antananarivo (on December 28) to demonstrate their opposition to Rajoelina. Once the holiday truce concludes after the New Year, agitation against the de facto government is likely to increase; these problems will not be resolved by a rush to hold elections, and may be made worse.

TALKING POINTS

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¶4. (SBU) Following are key talking points for the ICG meeting.

- The United States continues to support a consensual, inclusive political solution for the transition period, leading to free and fair elections as soon as possible. These elections must be managed by an inclusive and independent electoral commission, with credible effort made to ensure opposition participation, equal access to public media during the campaign, and a peaceful, secure environment in which to conduct elections.

- Rajoelina's recent actions represent a unilateral departure from the Maputo process that will only serve to prolong the political, social, and economic crisis, and postpone a real solution. His appointment of a new PM on December 20, and removal of opposition members of the transition government, have only served to worsen relations among Madagascar's political movements.

- In this tense political climate, it will not be possible to hold free or fair elections, particularly as the opposition will most likely boycott the entire endeavor. While elections remain the ultimate solution to this crisis, and should be the primary focus of a consensual transition government, this rush to hold them in March 2010 will only exacerbate current tensions among political actors.

- Now is the time for all members of the ICG, and the international community, to terminate assistance to the de facto government, particularly military assistance, and to consider targeted travel and financial sanctions against high-ranking members of the regime.

MARCH ELECTIONS: A RISK NOT WORTH TAKING

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15. (C) COMMENT: If the opposition changes tack in January and decides to accept the Rajoelina government, participate in elections, and renounce further demonstrations, a March 2010 poll could be a positive step forward. More likely, however, the problems detailed in paragraph 3 will persist, and may be made worse by renewed arrests, increased censorship, conflict within (or among) the security forces, or heavy-handed police tactics. The French position is based on a reading of the current situation that focuses on popular fatigue and political apathy, resulting in ever-weaker support for the opposition; in this view, expedient, if imperfect, elections would at least break the current impasse and provide a path towards democratic resolution. Given the current political climate, however, a more likely outcome is that the opposition boycotts the election, further poisoning the political climate for the next three months while Rajoelina pursues a pyrrhic electoral victory. Better to promote an immediate return to dialogue, with the recognition that a solution will take time and compromise, than give false hope that a rush to the polls can solve Madagascar's problems. END COMMENT.

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